"AN ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF JUDICIAL DECISION MAKING: THE IMPACT OF DIVERSITY DECISIONS ON HIGHER EDUCATION"

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The State of Tennessee has historically operated a dual system of higher education. Although dramatic changes have occurred over the past twenty years, many across the state continue to perceive this duality. This perception has contributed to the continuation of *Geier v. Sundquist,* the federal court decision which has governed the actions of higher education across Tennessee for over twenty years. Although considerable attention has been focused on the legal aspects of this perceived dualism, scant attention has been paid to those whom such policies impact on a daily basis, the students. This research addresses this shortcoming by focusing upon students' perceptions of diversity and their college experiences. Through the use of focus groups and student surveys, it provides generalizations about higher education policy from the perspective of the student.

Although great progress has been made in the areas of diversity and desegregation over the last twenty years, public higher education continues to be an entity that is separated in practice (Kronley and Hadley 1998). While there have been substantial gains in the number of African American students entering college, the percentage of blacks amongst freshman overall has changed very little. In Tennessee, African Americans comprise 19.3% of all 18 to 24 year olds, but only 17.7% of all first-time, full-time freshmen. Furthermore, research (Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith 1989) has shown that while minority aspirations have increased, actual minority enrollment rates continue to decline. After almost twenty years of intense efforts to increase higher education availability and access for minorities, their representation amongst first-time, full-time freshmen is less than it was in 1976. Furthermore, Tennessee has undergone the most marked decline for this demographic group of any state in the SREB.

As a recent report by the Southern Educational Foundation noted, many states in the South have made insufficient progress in desegregating their colleges and universities (Kronley and Hadley 1998). The college choices for black students are limited, and for the most part, blacks continue to be focused in two-year and historically black colleges and universities (HBCU). In all nineteen of the states analyzed by Kronley and Hadley, HBCU enrollment represented the majority of black freshman enrolled at public

institutions. In Tennessee, African Americans account for 17.7% of all first-time, full-time freshmen. Of this number, 24.4 % enrolled at Tennessee State University, 36.6% enrolled at two-year schools, while 36.6% enrolled at all other institutions.

RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

Research (Astin 1975; Nora 1987; Tinto 1993) has demonstrated that student perceptions of their educational experience impact persistence. Students who feel that their college is fair and devoid of racial stereotypes are more apt to persist towards their degree. A vast array of qualitative and quantitative studies have provided rich descriptions of the college experience from the perspective of the minority student. However, with the exception of recent articles by Nora and Cabrera (1996) and Eimers and Pike (1997), few studies have demonstrated the presence of a causal link between diversity policy and student perception. The purpose of this study is to identify the similarities and differences amongst minority and majority student opinion and discuss how perceptions are related to diversity efforts. This research examines several key research questions: (1) do black and white students have different views of their college environment; (2) how do students perceive the issues and conflicts created by a racially diverse student body; and (3) are institutions across Tennessee diverse centers of learning? If not, what measures can be taken to foster diversity? Our research addresses the college experience from the point of view of the African American student. We do this in two ways. We use focus groups for depth of understanding and survey research for generalizability to the broader population.

The large gap between African American and Caucasian college participation rates makes research on diversity initiatives important for educational planning and policy at all levels of the higher education structure. Furthermore, the phenomenon of voluntary segregation on campus highlights the need for survey research that measures students' perceptions in both social and academic settings. Through an assessment of socio-cultural alienation and academic satisfaction amongst minority students, administrators can determine whether the experiences of minorities differ significantly from those of white students. In fact, a review of the literature posits that such a difference does exist, both in terms of perceptions and opportunities.

The college bound portion of African American society that elects to attend white institutions often face a campus that does not have a tradition which facilitates their entry into its world. In fact, "everything from the rules of the fraternities to the old portraits on the walls conspire to impress upon them that they were cracking a historically alien fastness" (Pouncey 1993: 57). In her seminal work on African American student development at traditionally white institutions, Fleming (1984) found that this underlying campus climate of racism is not conducive to optimal academic performance and restricts the psychological development of minority students. Campus environments that are unsupportive of minorities lead to students having lower levels of satisfaction with their college experience. Such oppressive environments may also result in the premature exit of minority students from campus without their degree (Porter 1990; Hauser and Anderson 1991; Nora 1996).

Persistence

Research (Astin 1975; Pantager and Creedon 1978; Suen 1983) has also shown that socio-cultural alienation has an explanatory impact on dropout behavior for minorities. These studies have also demonstrated that levels of sociocultural alienation are significantly higher for African American students than for their other race peers. Because of the cultural dominance of whites and the pressure placed upon minorities to adopt white culture, minority students feel alienated from the culture of campus (Loo and Rolinson 1986). African American students are also more likely to perceive racial tension and hostility (Wright 1987). Additionally, they are also more likely to feel isolated (Fleming 1984) and are less apt to identify with their institutions (Allen et al 1981).

African American students are also more likely to express lower levels of overall satisfaction with college experience than are whites (Allen 1981; Gibbs 1982). Furthermore, black students are often treated as invisible by their white peers and are expected to conform to white standards (Willie and McCord 1972). This cycle perpetuates feelings and perceptions of alienation. Minorities who are able to persist at traditionally white institutions do so because they tolerate hostile environments, and in doing such do not experience the personal development and growth that college should provide (Chickering 1969; Perry 1970; Fleming 1984; Hughes 1987; Thompson and Fretz 1991). African American students attending traditionally white institutions are less likely to graduate on time, have lower overall grade point

averages, experience higher attrition rates, and matriculate into graduate programs at lower rates than white students (Astin 1982; Allen 1988; Smedley, Myers, and Harrell 1993).

A variety of explanations have been offered for these disturbing trends. Many suggest that African Americans perform at lower levels than their white counterparts because of the presence of racism and opposition on campus. Several authors (Fleming 1984; Patterson, Sedlacek, and Perry 1984; Allen 1985; Tracey and Sedlacek 1985; Cronen 1988) have demonstrated that African Americans are more likely than Caucasians to perceive their campuses as hostile, alienating, and socially isolating. Not only are African American students more likely to be estranged from the campus community (Fleming 1984; Sedlacek 1987), they are also more apt to perceive prejudice and discrimination on campus. These perceptions not only lesson their commitment to the institution, but also their completion to degree rates (Suen 1983; Smith 1989; Smedley, Myers, and Harrell 1993; Hurtado 1994). Fleming (1984) demonstrates that perceptions of discrimination impinge upon academic and cognitive growth and prevent persistence to degree.

All of these factors combine to create an environment that is detrimental to the academic development of minority students (Tracey and Sedlacek 1985; Nettles, Theony, and Grossman 1986). In addition to race related persistence issues, African American students also experience unique stressors that heighten feelings of not belonging and prevent their successful integration into the campus community (Smedley, Myers, and Harrell 1993). Minority status stresses compound the episodic and chronic stresses that all students must cope with such as financial aid problems, academic weakness, and feelings of homesickness (Allen 1988). Thus, African Americans are forced to cope with the conventional problems associated with the transition to college as well as the unique problems caused by their racial differences.

Structural diversity and its impact on students

The educational experience is intended to build both intellectual capital and to encourage personal growth (Bowen and Bok 1998). Axtell (1999) notes that the college campus is an environment in which students are thrown together in close quarters with several thousand self-selected and usually friendly others in a relatively safe environment where speech and thought are ideally free. This setting

creates a special opportunity for students to grow and learn through exposure to other races, philosophies, and cultures (Allport 1979).

Outcomes of diversity can be summarized in five categories as outlined in Milem (1999). Gurin (as cited in Milem 1999) provides three different types of outcomes that result from student involvement and experience in diverse environments. Learning outcomes refer to the benefits accrued through the process of teaching and learning. Diversity of theories, beliefs, and experiences add to the overall body of knowledge from which students draw their formal and informal education. Critical thinking skills are also affected by diverse environments during the college years. Pascarella et al (1996) and Gurin (1999) report that students with high levels of exposure to diverse opinions and issues show increases in their thinking skills, intellectual curiousity, and motivation. Democracy outcomes point to the advantage of diverse environments as they relate to being an active participant in society. Proactive involvement in the political process and community service are long-term benefits to efforts to increase racial representation on college campuses. Interactions in college with diverse individuals and ideas has a direct impact on one's likelihood to live in diverse communities upon graduation. Therefore, campus diversity initiatives can help to break the cycle of segregation in our society (Milem, 1999). Gurin's third outcome refers to the benefit that a student attains by living and working in diverse environments. In this increasingly global economy, the workforce cannot exist in an insular manner. The ability to work effectively with diverse people is a core value to economic and social success.

Milem (1999) adds two additional outcomes to the core posited by Gurin (1999). The fourth, process outcomes, reflects students' perceptions of diversity's impact on their college experience. Measures of student satisfaction and perceptions of the campus climate are central to this outcome. Students who participate in diverse groups in college are more likely to report a greater sense of community while in school and develop an understanding of perspectives other than theirs (Milem, 1999). The fifth outcome reflects those material benefits accrued from college attendance in diverse settings. The research presented in our study focuses on the process outcomes of the experience of students in Tennessee as well as touching on the economic and social benefits of access and opportunity to education.

Research (Sax and Astin 1997) has found that student experiences while in college contribute to the development of values that are conducive to improved race relations. Diversity allows students to cut across racial lines and contributes to increased cultural awareness and improves understandings of other race peers. Braddock (1985) has shown that individuals who attend desegregated school are more apt to accept desegregation later in life and have reduced racial stereotypes and other hostile reactions when placed in multi-racial settings. Bowen and Bok (1998) also found that students with extensive interracial exposures during college are more apt to have interracial friendships and are more supportive of diversity policies than their peers who did not have similar exposures.

Implicit in the traditional notion of college is the idea of "starting over." There is something to be learned from being in new surroundings, with new people, some of whom may be quite different from those whom the students are comfortable around. This notion is especially pertinent for students from large, urban, and racially homogenous environments. Students from such environments often go away to college so that they can experience social differences and grow from them (Bowen and Bok 1998). Because college is essentially America's petri dish, it is crucial that students gain exposure to new ideas, cultures, and beliefs during their college years. At no other time are individuals as receptive to, and/or exposed to, social stimuli and experimentation as during this time period. If the barriers of race are to ever be removed from society, higher education must provide the impetus for eradication.

Bowen and Bok (1998) note that there is a positive relationship between the relative size of the black student population and the degree of interaction between students. Increasing the number of minority students on campus creates a greater number of access points for cross cultural interaction (Blau 1977). Although direct measurements of the impact of diversity initiatives are difficult, several studies have attempted to measure its value to the student and society. Milem (1999) points to the need for empirical evidence of diversity's benefit. This evidence is necessary for higher education leaders to defend the rationale of diversity and the institution's desire to promote programs which foster diverse environments.

Milem posits that diverse ideas enter into the academy when there are diverse people involved in the institution and its decision-making mechanisms. Campuses with high levels of diversity and

supportive cultural climates have been shown to have positive effects on community and cultural awareness (Pascarella, Whitt, Nora, Edison, Hagedorn, & Terenzini, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Bowen & Bok, 1998; Milem 1999). Diverse environments in the college setting have been shown to lead to cultural awareness and a stronger micro and macro level commitment to diversity issues in general (Sax and Astin 1997). Research (Astin 1993) has demonstrated that exposure to interracial social settings positively impacts academic development and knowledge gains.

Although there are great benefits to campuses that institute structural diversity initiatives, such actions often lead to issues and concerns that were never imagined by administrators (Hurtado 1994). Such structural change effects both the academic and social life of the campus, resulting in the development of ethnic studies programs, diverse student organizations, and multi-cultural programming (Peterson 1978; Munoz 1989; Trevino 1992). Structural change may also increase the perception of conflict by whites as the number of minority students increases (Blaylock 1967). Campuses can minimize this conflict by creating a student-centered environment where students feel that faculty and administrators are devoted to their development. Faculty and administrators can facilitate the creation of such an environment by implementing effective educational interventions such as campus-wide diversity workshops, racial tolerance conferences, and cultural awareness summits (Hurtado 1992; Banks 1995; Springer 1996).

As institutions of higher education in Tennessee continue to strive for diversity, they must remember to stay in touch with the needs of their clientele, the students. If one were to talk to African American students and ask them what they think about college, what would he find? Administrators must remember that students are what ultimately underlie any diversity effort. For diversity policies to be successful, students must be secure in their campus and feel that college is where they belong.

Freeman (1997) notes that one of the most effective means to develop the impressions of security and belonging is to give students more of a voice on recruitment and retention issues. Administrators should seek from currently enrolled students an understanding of the programs and policies that have been successful for them personally and may be effective for improving the experiences of other minority students in the future. Such client based policy analysis tools have been the basis of several institution

diversity initiatives across the country (Hurtado et. al. 1998). The paradox is that minority students are rarely involved in the planning of the very diversity polices that are designed for their benefit. This omission is one of the primary factors contributing to the failure of such policies (Freeman 1997).

METHODOLOGY

Focus group sessions are a helpful tool in answering questions of how and why people behave as they do. This methodology has a rich history in the arena of marketing research (MacLachlan 1980; Vichas 1983). It is only recently that social scientists have discovered the utility of such research techniques (Krueger 1988). Focus group research is an excellent complement to quantitative surveys, offering an explanation of numerical data by providing insight into a rationale for certain attitudes or behaviors. A core strength of this research method is that the dynamics of the group situation may encourage participants to disclose behavior and attitudes that they might not consciously reveal in conventional surveys. Marketing researchers have been using such tools to gauge client's perceptions of products and services. Individuals, purposefully selected, meet in small groups to discuss the products and services being studied. The interviewer or moderator raises various issues, focusing the discussion on topics of interest to the researcher. This research utilizes this innovative research technique to obtain information from students about their college experiences.

While focus groups can provide tremendous insight into the attitudes of those in the discussion, they have one major flaw. Focus groups add value to the research enterprise by providing depth and breadth to our understanding. However, it is not possible to generalize from the study group to the larger group from which they are taken because focus groups are often too small in number and their members are not randomly chosen from the target population. Moreover, the dynamic of the group itself can likely affect the outcome, with the nature of the group and the topic of discussion affecting comments from participants (Janis 1982). Likewise, a vocal member of the group can lead the discussion in a direction that it would not otherwise go.

By coupling quantitative research tools with the qualitative instrument described above, we are able to overcome many of the inherent weaknesses presented by relying entirely upon on research paradigm. The quantitative tool, survey research, has the benefit of allowing the researcher to generalize

from those taking the survey to the population as a whole. This generalization is legitimate to the degree to which the sample surveyed is randomly chosen from among those in the population and the questions utilized are free of bias. In this research we utilized the survey of enrolled students administered under the state's performance funding program. The survey findings allow us to directly measure the degree to which African American students evaluate their academic, social, and cultural experience as compared with their non-African American counterparts. Moreover, analysis of survey data helps to unravel relationships among these variables, including the relative importance of cultural, social, and academic experience on students' overall evaluations of their college experience. Finally, it is possible to compare survey findings for two or more groups and ascertain whether the groups are significantly different on the theoretical variables in question.

Focus Group Methodology

Undergraduate African American students attending Tennessee public colleges and universities were the target population for this research. The study sought to determine the perception of this group for a variety of reasons. Under the direction and leadership of the state's Desegregation Monitoring Committee (DMC), diversity efforts have become a major initiative at all campuses. Because African Americans students are the ultimate benefactors of these efforts, the DMC staff was particularly interested in their perceptions and opinions.

Selected institutions for this study were asked to organize the focus group sessions and were given a set of demographic variables by the Higher Education Commission's Academic Affairs staff. These demographics were based upon the overall distribution of student population characteristics such as age, gender, class rank, and housing status (See Appendix A). The questions used during the focus groups were developed and reviewed by the staffs of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the University of Tennessee, and the Tennessee Board Regents. Furthermore, a pilot session was conducted to ensure proper timing, order, and delivery of the designated questions. A constant moderator conducted each session and assistant moderators were present to provide assistance as needed. The same staff was present at all institutions, thereby increasing the internal and external validity of the research. Each session lasted approximately 1.5 hours and was audiotaped.

Each focus group was asked the same core questions (see Appendix B). General questions regarding why students decided to attend their respective campuses were used to begin the sessions, allowing the students a chance to talk and adjust to the group. Additional questions were asked as necessary to expand upon issues or probe into an area that was being discussed. Students were assured that although the sessions were being taped, their responses would remain anonymous in any reports that were generated as a result of the study. Immediately after each session, the moderator and assistant moderators noted common perceptions and opinions expressed by participants during the interviews. The moderators and assistant moderators later met to discuss and evaluate the interviews. The audiotapes of each session were summarized and evaluated to detect reoccurring themes in each of the six sessions. A draft report of the analysis was prepared for review by members of the moderating team to check the validity of its results, conclusions, and recommendations.

Survey Research Methodology

The survey results are drawn from the combined sample of enrolled students in four-year colleges in Tennessee during the years between 1993 and 1997. For purposes of this paper we utilized students' evaluations of their academic, social, and cultural experience as well as their evaluations of their overall college or university experience. (See appendix 3 questions 4-7). These questions, asked at the beginning of the survey, provide summary reactions to the college experience that are not in an artifact of the research process.

Our interest is in the degree to which African American students differ from their counterparts on their evaluations as well as whether the groups differ on the relative salience of academic, social, and cultural experiences in determining their overall evaluations of their college experience. While the former is relatively easy to establish with a comparison of means, the latter task demands a multivariate method that measures the independent effect of each predictor in accounting for variation in the overall student experience.

In this paper we utilize simultaneous equation analysis using the Maximum Likelihood Estimator (MLE) technique. This technique, similar to path analysis in with multiple regression, provides unstandardized coefficients ranging from -1 to +1 that allow for comparisons between the relative effects

of different independent variables, with "no effect" at the zero point. The resulting models are both efficient and parsimonious.

RESULTS FROM FOCUS GROUPS

Why did you choose to attend this institution?

Students considered cost, size, location, racial demographics, and support services as the most important factors in their decision to attend their current institution. They also weighed the reputation of the school, familiarity with the campus environment, personal recommendations, and how well they felt that they would fit into the campus as a whole. The majority of all focus group participants received some form of financial assistance from both the institutions and the state. In most cases, the choices made by black students to attend traditionally white institutions were made under the realization that they would be in the minority and would receive less peer support than they are traditionally used to in the home environments in which they have localized support groups and personal infrastructures. Student comments included the following:

- I came here because I got a scholarship and because it was close to home.
- I came here because I wanted to get away from home and out of from my comfort zone. I got so used to being around people like me that I thought coming to school here would expand my boundaries and make me a better person.
- I went to an all black high school and I wanted to go to this college because the world is not an all black world and I need to learn how to work with white people.

How would you describe your academic experience?

The majority of all focus group participants were very pleased with their academic experiences on campus. Students were concerned about the lack of same race faculty members at their institutions. They were also troubled by the unique treatment that they received from majority group faculty members because of their race. Although none of the students at any of the sessions were able to point to an instance of overt racism by a faculty member, they were able to point to differential treatment based upon race. These findings directly parallel those of Hurtado et. al.(1998) who found that minority students are often beacons of cultural isolation during class discussion related to racially sensitive issues. This isolation negatively impacts the academic development and success of minorities. Students were also very troubled with the poor overall quality of advice they received from campus advising centers.

Negative experiences related to advising were especially salient at large institutions that relied upon graduate students serving in advising centers to delivery the majority of academic guidance to undergraduate minority students. Student comments regarding their academic experience included the following:

- My freshman English class was the first class I ever went to, and it was all white. That was the first time in my life that I had ever been in an all white class.

- My academic experience here has been fantastic, and it id the main reason that I have enjoyed my time at this college so much. I only wish that the rest of my experiences here would have been as good as my experiences in class and with faculty.

- It seems as if teachers are always turning to me when they talk about "black issues" in class. Just because I am black does not give them the right to always look at me when we talk about civil rights. It is like they ignore the rest of the class and single me out.

How would you describe your relationships with faculty members?

This study confirmed research by Pouncey (1993) which found that African American students were not prepared for the degree to which their opinions were assumed to represent the totality of African American perspectives. Students perceived their faculty to be knowledgeable, receptive, and sincere. Students generally enjoyed their professorial relations, but resented being singled out because of their race in class. Such experiences only act to further multiply feelings of alienation and hinders academic development. Student comments included the following:

- I don't have any problems with faculty; I just don't like having to be a spokesperson for all black people. Just because I am black does not mean that I can speak for my entire race.

- I have had great teachers, but I have never had a black teacher. It seems as if the black faculty that are here do not really care about us. They need to do more to help us. *Ms. Blank* cannot do it all on her own.

- We need more black faculty at this school. It is very possible that you can go through four years at this place and never have had a black teacher.

Are you satisfied with the social opportunities presented to you here?

The accepted view of college campuses is that race relations are poor, social interactions are low, and that students self segregate themselves (Altbach and Lomotey 1991; Benzel 1992). This study confirmed that cross-cultural interactions are low at Tennessee institutions, but this does not mean that race relations are poor. In fact, there was very little mention of racial tension during any of the sessions. This does mean, however, that African-American students are satisfied with the social experience present on campus. Generally, African American students are not satisfied with the social opportunities presented

to them in college. Students report being alienated, left out of the planning for campus events, and not

part of the campus as a whole. Furthermore, they stated that they do not have many of the same

opportunities on campus that whites have socially. Student comments include:

- The social life here is for whites. They have the fraternity houses, they have the power, and they have the system. We are left out.
- I like it here, but people from this section of the state do not seem to know how to react to us. Many times I feel as if I am the first black person people around here have ever seen in person.
- I really don't hang out with too many white people. Most of the time I deal with them in class, but that is about it. Once you get past the classroom, there is not much going on between white people and black people here.

Do you live on or off campus, and what is that experience like?

The students were also asked to assess the environment in the dormitories and student residence

halls on campus. Research (Willie and McCord 1972; Pace 1984; Tinto 1993) has shown that students

who live on campus are better adjusted, happier with their college experience, are more apt to feel part of

the community, and have higher persistence levels. This study found that students are very satisfied with

their on campus experience and credit most of the friendships, campus activities, and sense of self to their

dormitories. However, the sessions revealed further evidence of an absence of pluralism on college

campuses. Student comments include:

- I love living on campus because it lets me get to know all kinds of people.
- Living on-campus is great, but I hate the police here. It seems as if the police single us out because we are black. If there are more than five of us in a group they break us up, but a bunch of white people can hang out and the police leave them alone.
- I live off campus and I think that is one of the big reasons why I do not feel part of this. I simply miss out on too much. The people that live on campus seem to be real tight and I miss that.

If you were to start college over again, would you still choose to come to this institution?

African American students frequently find themselves isolated in academic settings on

predominantly White college campuses. They may often be the only African American student in their

classrooms, and they are often called upon only as the primary spokespersons for Black issues. Further

complicating the problem, these students often do not have the opportunity to interact with African

American faculty members, and the classroom materials they use may not include the contributions that

people of color have made to the subject under study (Moses 1989; Mitchell 1991).

Given this background, it does not take a blind leap of faith to conclude that African American students have conflicting opinions about their college choices. Many students are satisfied with the quality of their education, and this satisfaction would compel them to return to the same school if given the opportunity. Other students have been tainted by their experiences and would not return to their present institution. Student comments include:

- I would come to this school again because it has taught me how to be strong. I am thankful for college because it has taught me how to work. Its seems as if we as black people have been conditioned to be passive towards whites and their needs. One thing that this school has taught me is how to be assertive around white people and make them respect me.

- I would not come back because there is more to college than academics. The academics here have been great, but there is more to college than classes. Even though I received a scholarship, no I would not come back. I would go to an all black school.

- I would come back to this school because it is a good school for the money. The social life here is getting better, but it has a long way to go. I really enjoyed it here, especially academically. I feel that I learned much more here than my friends did who went to HBCU's.

Would you recommend that your friends come here?

The experiences detailed above also colored the students' ability to recommend their present institution to others. Such recommendations are often very important for institutional recruiting efforts (Astone and Womack 1990). Potential students are also heavily influenced by the advice given to them from current students (Astin 1993). This study revealed that student recommendations are at best conditional. Student comments include:

- I would not recommend this school as a whole. There are parts of it that are good, but overall this place is not that great. There is nothing here for black people.

- I would recommend this school to others, but only to a certain type of person. If you want to come to school and work then this is a good place. If you are coming to school to party then this is not the place for you.

- I would come back to school here, but I would not tell my friends to come here because most of them are not ready for how hard it is. Not only was this place challenging academically, it is very difficult to get used to the cultural isolation.

What do you think is the overall strength of this school?

The importance of Black Cultural Centers, Minority Students Affairs Offices, and the staffs that make these entities run were commonly mentioned as the overall strength of each institution. These organizations are often the primary social, academic, and familial link between the student and campus. Research (Green 1989; Smith 1989; Astone and Womack 1990) has shown that such ethnic centers serve

as the core of the minority student's experience on campus. They alone provide a haven of cultural

sameness and are the primary connection between the student and the campus community. The positive

impact that these organizations made upon the lives of black students was heavily discussed at every

focus group session. Students stressed that their lives were formed, shaped, and directed by these centers

and organizations. In many cases, students expressed more allegiance to their Multicultural Student

Offices than they did to the university as a whole. Student comments include:

- I really do not know where I would be without the Black Cultural Center (BCC). The BCC is the anchor for our community, it is kind of like "Cheers", everyone knows your name here and it allows you to have a sense of home. The BCC is the at the heart of most black people's lives at this school.

- *Dr. Blank* is great, but she is only one person. She needs some help. If it was not for her I do not know where I would be.

- *Ms. Blank* is the best thing about this place. She gets us involved and she gets us going. She has introduced me to a bunch of clubs and pushed me into leadership positions.

What would you change at this institution?

The participants at every session were very open and honest regarding their experience on

campus. This honesty was coupled with the sincere desire to improve their representative institutions for

all students. It is interesting to note the diversity of issues noted by students when asked this question.

Administrators would be wise to include many of these suggestions in their campus mission statements

and strategic master plans.   Their comments and suggestions include:

- It seems that now that we have reached our numbers the school does not care about us. They make a big deal to get us here, but don't provide anything for us once we get here.

- I would reach out to the community more. There are a lot of black people here and the school does not reach out to them. This is as a racist city and the school could help to make this a better place to live but they do not.

- We need more black faculty and staff. I have no one of authority to talk to other than the people at the Black Cultural Center because, other than the janitors, there are no black people here.

- We need more resources for black people at this campus. Our fraternities have no place to meet, and we don't have a Black Cultural Center like some other schools do. It is hard enough being black in an all-white world, but it is even harder when the school does not give you any resources to work with.

RESULTS FROM SURVEY RESEARCH

The attitudes of African Americans students toward their educational experience must ultimately be gauged systematically and relative to those of their other race peers.   While survey research cannot provide the in-depth understanding granted by focus groups, it does allow comparisons between two groups and the evaluation of the null hypotheses that there in no difference between the groups.   This notion of "no difference" must be overcome before one can begin to make assertions from the data about the attitudes/opinions of minority students.

In this paper we use the results of surveys of enrolled students to evaluate the differences between African American and non-African American students in their evaluations of their overall, academic, social, and cultural experience. We also create separate models for each group of students in order to gauge the differential import of academic, social, and cultural experience in explaining students' overall experience. Our expectation are that African-American students will provide lower evaluations of their experiences.   We also expect cultural experiences to be more of a factor in explaining the overall experiences of African American students than among their counterparts.

Both these expectations are borne out by the results of the simultaneous equation analysis presented in Figure 1.   On a four point scale ranging from poor (1) to excellent (4) African -American students rated their experiences less positively than did other students. This difference is especially pronounced for academic and overall experience. However, they provided higher evaluations of their high school preparation for college. Clearly any notion that African-American students feel less prepared than other students is not borne out by these results.

The models presented in Figure 1 verify the importance of African-Americans' cultural experiences, especially relative to those of other students.   While social experience has about the same effect for both groups of students, African-Americans are much more likely to base (.33) their overall experience on their cultural experiences than are others (.14).

FIGURE 1

Absolute (Means) and Relative Importance of Academic, Social, and Cultural Experience in Explaining Overall Experience: Maximum Likelihood Estimators (Standardized)

Non African American Students (37,876)

Mean

| 2.88 | High School Preparation |

.14

| 2.94 | Academic Experience | .46

| 2.79 | Social Experience | .36 | Overall Experience | 2.92 |

| 252 | Cultural Experience | .14

| R^2=49% |

African American Students (5,494)

Mean

| 2.92 | High School Preparation |

.15

| 2.74 | Academic Experience | .35

| 2.70 | Social Experience | .32 | Overall Experience | 2.75 |

| 2.44 | Cultural Experience | .33

| R^2=45% |
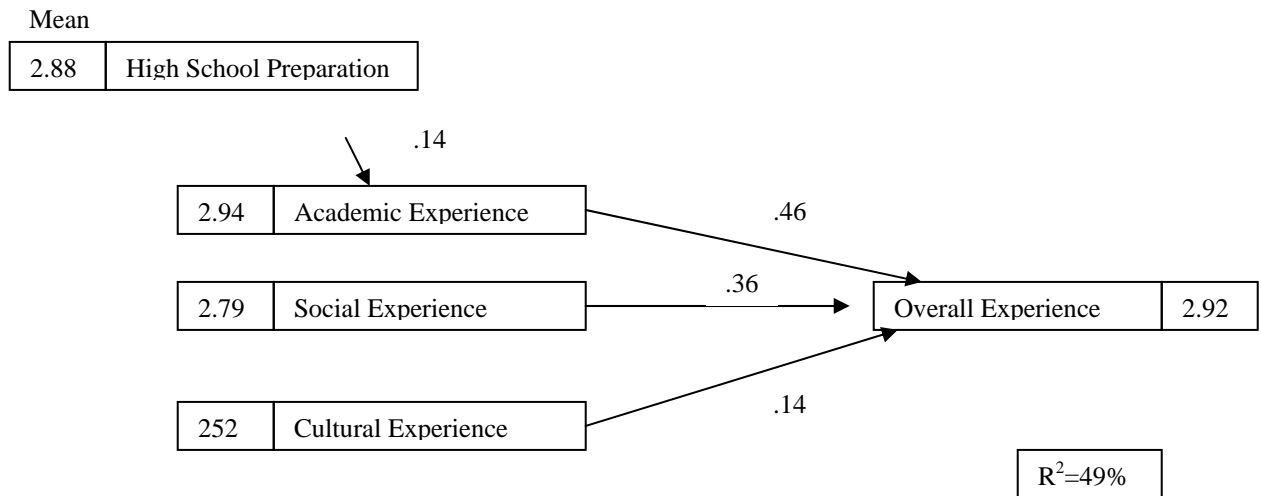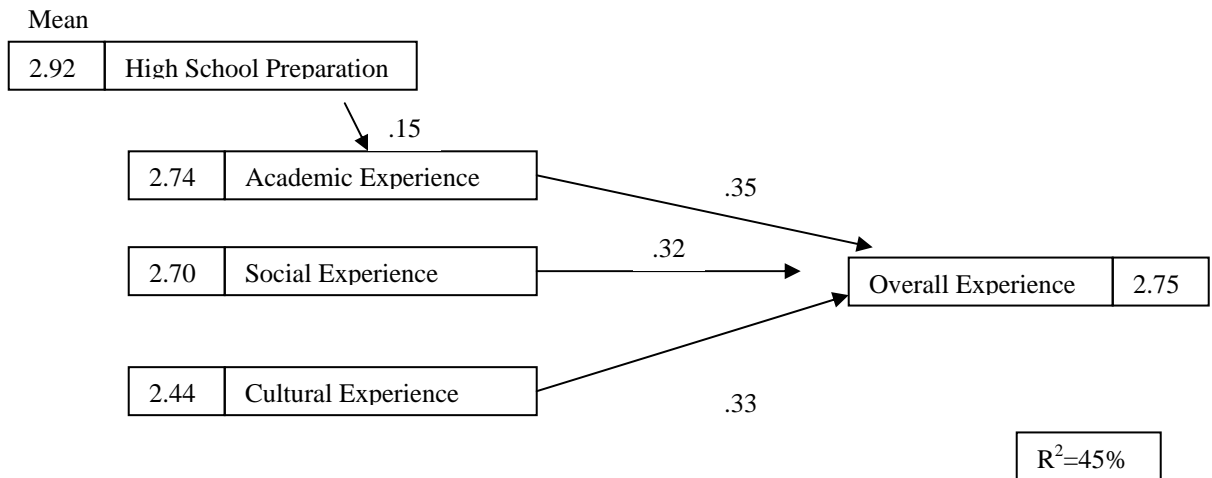
All differences between means and paths are significant (p<.05)

CONCLUSIONS

This study answers the call of the Southern Regional Education Board (1990) to examine student perceptions, concerns, and attitudes about their college experience and provides several keen insights into the state of higher education for minorities across Tennessee. The results demonstrate that there are

significant differences in the manner in which black and white students perceive their college experience. The findings indicate that holding race constant, the majority of students were satisfied with their overall college experience. However, African American students rated their overall experience lower than their other race peers, with more than one-third of such students rating their experience negatively. Our research also indicates that all students (regardless of race) perceived a general lack of institutional support for minorities. Although most students do not perceive a campus climate of hostility towards individuals of color, minority students noted that they often feel neglected by their institutions. Minority students also stated that they do not have the same resources, support, or facilities as their other race peers. Although many institutions have minority student affairs offices, these entities are overworked, inadequately staffed, and incapable of meeting the needs of all students.

Overall, most students seem to be open-minded about the issue of race, and the participants reported relatively few examples of overt racism. However, student perceptions of their institution's cultural and social environments differed significantly by race. African American students were more likely to feel alienated, isolated, and shut out from many of the opportunities available to their other race peers. Although the results do not show grave inadequacies, they do suggest that much work is still needed to overcome many of the obstacles faced by minorities on campuses across Tennessee. Furthermore, the findings help to provide a foundation upon which institutions can address the needs of their respective students.

This study demonstrates that a paradigm shift is needed at every institution to improve conditions for students of all races. This shift in focus towards the needs of students and away from an infatuation with judicially determined numbers will positively impact all aspects of the campus. College campuses are enriched by diversity, and the embrace of cultural pluralism will do much to enhance the participation and success of students of every race and nationality. Institutions that recognize and respond to the need for greater cultural diversity in the academy will broaden the range of experience for all students.

There is a critical need in higher education to create diverse and multicultural institutions of higher education. Yet there may be no idea, strategy, or right way for all institutions to proceed; there is no universal policy cookbook to remedy the many problems created by the implementation of diversity

initiatives. Strategic plans and mission statements of higher education institutions have increasingly affirmed the value of diversity on the college campus (Alger, 1998, as cited in Milem, 1999). Campuses serve as the most diverse environment that many citizens will find themselves in and most institutions have willingly accepted the awesome opportunity to influence social change. As attacks on the value of diversity multiply in the courts, higher education officials and advocates must do a much better job of promoting the value that is added by diverse backgrounds and interests to the campus environment and to the individual learner. Although centralized planning and organization at the state and board level will facilitate diversity, it is the campus that will ultimately prove to be the determinant of any diversity effort. Campuses should be given broad latitude to shape the implementation so that it is congruent with each of their own unique personalities.

The historical legacy of segregation on campuses across this state is an essential element in the overall picture of diversity because many campuses have long standing benefits to majority groups that are imbedded in the universities culture (Duster 1993). This historical context is instrumental in setting the climate for diversity and attempts to create a wholesome and supportive environment for students of color (Peterson et al 1978; Richardson and Skinner 1991; Hurtado et al 1998). Tennessee's historical need for legal pressure and litigation to serve as the catalyst for diversity has only heightened the public perception of division and opposition towards people of color.

Increasing the structural diversity of a campus can have positive impacts on the institutional climate. Campuses with a large percentage of white students provide limited opportunities for cross cultural interchange and limit the cultural development of all students. An environment with increased levels of minority students will effectively alter the dynamic of all social interactions and promote an advanced learning environment for all races. An increase in structural diversity will also decrease the perception of minorities as tokens. Research (Kanter 1977) has shown that the perception of tokenism contributes to a heighten awareness of the minority group and further distorts exaggerated racial stereotypes.

However, administrators must remember that increases in the number of minority students is not without problems itself. Restructuring enrollment percentages can lead to conflict and resistance amongst

all groups.   Altering the structural diversity of a campus may also present further problems and result in the need for changes that were never imagined at the administrative level. Structural modifications will effect both the academic and social life of the campus, resulting in the development of ethnic studies programs, diverse student organizations, and multi-cultural programming (Peterson et al 1978; Munoz 1989; Trevino 1992). Administrators must never lose sight of the fact that their sole purpose is to better the university and improve the services that it provides to the student. They must also remember that successful diversity efforts must be more than vague policy propositions enumerated from a hierarchical administrative structure. In order to be truly successful, diversity must be a grass roots effort with the onus of implementation placed upon the street level bureaucrat.

References in the literature to "campus-wide assessment of cultural climate" point to mechanisms that single institutions can utilize to enhance diversity (Hale 1991; Etzioni 1992; Darder 1994; Edgert 1994; Ingle 1994; Justiz 1994). Hale (1991) and Etzioni (1992) posit that the campus culture alone cannot truly be assessed without the participation of all constituency groups on campus. Ingle (1994) proposes the use of portfolio assessment teams for assessment of campus diversity. Such a process would involve members of the campus leadership maintaining a constant dialogue with various racial and ethnic groups. Along with outside consultants, these groups would form leadership teams to shape diversity goals and implement action plans for ameliorating inadequacies in the campus environment.

Such diversity initiatives are essential if Tennessee and other states are to move forward into the 21st century. As the United States becomes increasingly multicultural, the need for colleges and universities to prepare students for an increasingly diverse workforce is increased. The future of this nation is inextricably tied to an educated population that can contribute to the labor force, the economy, and to society as a whole. If one-third of the country will be composed of minority persons by the year 2010, as demographers predict, minority citizens must be included in the economic, political, social, and educational mainstream (Green 1989). Higher education has a vital role to play in this process, both as a force for social justice and in producing an educated and productive citizenry.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

Focus Group Sampling Frames

- **The University of Tennessee, Chattanooga**

	Number	Percent	Focus Group Targets
Number of AA Students	1188		15
Male	417	35%	6
Female	771	65%	9
Upper-class	791	67%	10
Lower-class	397	33%	5
On Campus	487	41%	7
Off campus	701	59%	8
Age = 17-25	1019	86%	13
Age = 25 and older	169	14%	2

- **The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

	Number	Percent	Focus Group Targets
Number of AA Students	1087		15
Male	482	44%	7
Female	605	56%	8
Upper-class	674	62%	9
Lower-class	413	38%	6
On Campus	647	60%	9
Off campus	440	40%	6
Age = 17-25	932	86%	13
Age = 25 and older	155	14%	2

- **The University of Tennessee, Martin**

	Number	Percent	Focus Group Targets
Number of AA Students	778		15
Male	249	32%	5
Female	529	68%	10
Upper-class	417	54%	8
Lower-class	361	46%	7
On Campus	579	75%	11
Off campus	199	25%	4
Age = 17-25	682	88%	13
Age = 25 and older	96	12%	2

- **East Tennessee State University**

	Number	Percent	Focus Group Targets
Number of AA Students	440		15
Male	230	52%	8
Female	210	48%	7
Upper-class	265	60%	9
Lower-class	175	40%	6
On Campus	220	50%	8
Off campus	220	50%	7
Age = 17-25	321	73%	11
Age = 25 and older	119	27%	4

- **The University of Memphis**

	Number	Percent	Focus Group Targets
Number of AA Students	4704		15
Male	1445	31%	5
Female	3259	69%	10
Upper-class	3659	78%	11
Lower-class	1045	22%	4
On Campus	6000	12%	3
Off campus	4104	88%	12
Age = 17-25	2921	62%	10
Age = 25 and older	1783	38%	5

- **Middle Tennessee State University**

	Number	Percent	Focus Group Targets
Number of AA Students	1778		15
Male	741	42%	6
Female	1037	58%	9
Upper-class	769	43%	6
Lower-class	1009	57%	9
On Campus	511	29%	5
Off campus	1267	71%	10
Age = 17-25	1395	78%	12
Age = 25 and older	383	22%	3

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

In order to increase the reliability and validity of the results, a constant set of questions were asked at each

institution. The facilitator asked the following questions, probing for certain details as indicated:

> **Question One:** *Why did you choose to attend this institution?*
>
> **Question Two:** *What had the greatest impact on your decision to come to school here?*
>
> **Question Three:** *How would you describe your experience here?*
>
> **Question Four**: *How many of you receive some type of financial aid?*
>
> - Problems in the financial aid process?
>
> **Question Five:** *How would you describe your social life on this campus?*
>
> - Have you developed close friendships?
>
> - Have you developed close friendships with members of other racial groups?
>
> - Are you satisfied with the social opportunities presented to you here?
>
> **Question Six:** *How would you describe your relationships with faculty members?*
>
> - How would you describe your relations with faculty members and advisors?
>
> - Do you feel that the faculty are interested in students?
>
> - Do you feel that faculty treat you differently because of your race?
>
> **Question Seven:** *Do you live on or off campus?*
>
> - Has your experience in the dorms been favorable or unfavorable?
>
> - Do you feel that living on campus has given you a stronger tie to the institution?
>
> - Why did some of you choose to live off campus
>
> **Question Eight:** *Are you satisfied with your academic experience here?*
>
> **Question Nine:** *If you were to start college over again, would you still choose to come to this institution?*
>
> **Question Ten:** *Would you recommend that your friends come here?*
>
> **Question Eleven:** *What do you think is the overall strength of this school?*

As stated previously, the core questions above were posed to the respondents at every institution.

Although each session took on a unique personality and character, the presence of a core set of questions

and a constant moderator increases the generalizability of the findings.

APPENDIX C

STATEWIDE STUDENT SURVEY

In this questionnaire, you are asked to respond with regard to your experience at The University of Blank State. Please select your response from the choices given and circle the appropriate number on this form.

1. How satisfied are you with the educational experience you have had at BSU?
   1 VERY DISSATISFIED   2 DISSATISFIED   3 SATISFIED   4 VERY SATISFIED

	Definitely No	Probably No	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes
2. Do you think your high school adequately prepared you for college work?	1	2	3	4
3. If you could start college again, would you enroll at BSU?	1	2	3	4

How do you rate the following aspects of your BSU experience?	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
4. Your academic experience.	1	2	3	4
5. Your social experience.	1	2	3	4
6. Your cultural experience.	1	2	3	4
7. Your overall experience.	1	2	3	4

While attending BSU, how often would you say you have done each of the following?	Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Often
8. Used library reference materials.	1	2	3	4
9. Developed a bibliography or set of references for a written project.	1	2	3	4
10. Written a rough draft of a paper and then revised it before handing it in.	1	2	3	4
11. Completed a paper or project that integrated ideas from several sources.	1	2	3	4
12. Used your notes or class lectures or readings.	1	2	3	4
13. Applied a concept or technique you learned in class.	1	2	3	4
14. Worked on an assignment where you used a computer.	1	2	3	4
15. Tried to explain a method or theory to another person.	1	2	3	4
16. While at BSU, with how many faculty members have you developed a close relationship (such that you feel you could ask them for a letter of recommendation)?	None	1	2	3 or more

OVER, PLEASE

Here are a few questions about campus programs and services. Please indicate how frequently you use each service and indicate the quality of the service you receive.

| | | How often do you use this service? | | | | | Rate the quality of service you receive. | | | | |
		Never	Seldom	Occasionally	Often		Not Applicable	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Library	17.	1	2	3	4	18.	1	2	3	4	5
Career Services	19.	1	2	3	4	20.	1	2	3	4	5
Campus Bookstore	21.	1	2	3	4	22.	1	2	3	4	5

Here are more campus services. Please indicate how clear the procedures are in these offices and indicate the quality of service you receive.

| | | How clear are the procedures? | | | | | Rate the quality of service you receive. | | | | |
		Did not use	Very Confusing	Somewhat Confusing	Clear		Not Applicable	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Admissions	23.	1	2	3	4	24.	1	2	3	4	5
Registration	25.	1	2	3	4	26.	1	2	3	4	5
Financial Aid	27.	1	2	3	4	28.	1	2	3	4	5
Campus Security	29.	1	2	3	4	30.	1	2	3	4	5
Counseling Center	31.	1	2	3	4	32.	1	2	3	4	5

In answering the questions in this section, please think of your overall experience at BSU. Please indicate the degree to which your education at BSU has added to your skills in each of the following areas.

		Very little	Somewhat	Very much
33.	Practical skills necessary to obtain employment in your field.	1	2	3
34.	Getting along with people of different races and ethnic groups.	1	2	3
35.	Ability to grow and learn as a person.	1	2	3
36.	Ability to lead or guide others.	1	2	3
37.	Ability to adjust to new job demands.	1	2	3
38.	Self-confidence in expressing your ideas.	1	2	3
39.	Appreciation of different cultures.	1	2	3
40.	Planning and carrying out projects.	1	2	3
41.	Speaking effectively.	1	2	3
42.	Writing effectively.	1	2	3
43.	Understanding written information.	1	2	3
44.	Understanding graphic information.	1	2	3
45.	Learning on your own.	1	2	3

		Very little	Somewhat	Very much
46.	Defining and solving problems.	1	2	3
47.	Working cooperatively in a group.	1	2	3
48.	Ability to understand mathematical concepts.	1	2	3
49.	Understanding global environmental concerns.	1	2	3
50.	Understanding and appreciating the arts.	1	2	3
51.	Understanding and applying scientific principles and methods.	1	2	3
52.	Understanding different philosophies and cultures.	1	2	3
53.	Ability to use mathematics in everyday life.	1	2	3

The following questions relate to your major.   If for any reason you have not yet declared a major, please skip to question 69.   What is your major? _____

	Thinking about your major, please rate the quality of each item and its importance to you.	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	Not Applicable
54.	Availability of your major advisor.	1	2	3	4	5
55.	Willingness of your major advisor to help.	1	2	3	4	5
56.	Clarity of degree requirements in the major.	1	2	3	4	5
57.	Clarity of objectives for courses in the major.	1	2	3	4	5
58.	Opportunities for formal student evaluation of instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
59.	Availability of faculty to help students outside of class.	1	2	3	4	5
60.	Availability of faculty to talk informally.	1	2	3	4	5
61.	Quality of courses in preparing you for employment.	1	2	3	4	5
62.	Quality of instruction in the major.	1	2	3	4	5
63.	Opportunity to apply what was learned in the classroom.	1	2	3	4	5
64.	Practicum/internship/coop experience in the major.	1	2	3	4	5
65.	Opportunities to express ideas in writing in the major.	1	2	3	4	5

		Definitely No	Probably No	Probably Yes	Definitely Yes
66.	If you could choose your major again, would you choose the same major?	1	2	3	4

	Thinking of your own experiences at BSU, to what extent do you feel that each of the following is emphasized?	Very weak	Weak	Strong	Very strong
67.	Emphasis on being critical, evaluative, and analytical.	1	2	3	4
68.	Emphasis on the development of vocational and occupational competence.	1	2	3	4
69.	Emphasis on the personal relevance and practical value of your courses.	1	2	3	4

OVER, PLEASE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

70. What is your gender?
    1 Female   2 Male

71. How old were you when you first began at BSU?
1 Under 22	2 22 to 24
3 25 to 30	4 31 to 45
5 46 to 60	6 Over 60

72. How old are you now?
1 Under 22	2 22 to 24
3 25 to 30	4 31 to 45
5 46 to 60	6 Over 60

73. What is your race/ethnic group?
1 Oriental/Pacific Islander	2 Native American
3 Black	4 Hispanic, non-Black
5 Caucasian	6 Unknown

74. For the most part, are you a part-time or full-time student?
1 Part-time, Day	2 Full-time, Day
3 Part-time, Evening	4 Part-time, Evening

75. Do you work while attending BSU?
    1 No
    2 Yes, primarily on campus
    3 Yes, primarily off campus

76. If you work while attending BSU, about how many hours each week do you work?
1 Fewer than 10 hours	2 10 to 19 hours
3 20 to 29 hours	4 30 to 40 hours
5 Over 40 hours	6 I do not work

77. How many credit hours have you earned at BSU (not counting this term)?
    1   Fewer than 12
    2   12 to 24
    3   25 to 48
    4   49 or more

If you have any other comments to make about your experiences at The University of Blank State, and its effect on your personal or professional life, please use the space below.   Thank you very much for your help!

Some of the items in this questionnaire were provided with the kind permission of Dr. Robert Pace; others used with the permission of American College Testing.